United Nations S/2017/357

Security Council

Distr.: General
25 April 2017

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to resolution 2299 (2016)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Secretary Council resolution 2299 (2016), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on progress made towards fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The report covers key developments related to Iraq and provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq since my last report (S/2017/75) and the briefing of my Special Representative to the Security Council on 2 February 2017.

II. Summary of key political developments pertaining to Iraq

A. Political situation

2. The Iraqi security forces, including the popular mobilization forces, the Peshmerga, and local fighters, with support from the international counter-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) coalition, continued to make progress in the fight to liberate Mosul and Ninawa from ISIL following the liberation of eastern Mosul on 24 January. On 19 February, Prime Minister Al Abadi ordered the start of military operations to liberate western Mosul. With the support of the international counter-ISIL coalition, Iraqi security forces made advances, reaching old Mosul and liberating, by the end of March, about half of western Mosul.

3. In a statement on 22 March in Washington, D.C., the 68 members of the international counter-ISIL coalition commended their Iraqi partners, who have liberated more than 60 per cent of territory previously held by ISIL. Coalition members committed to continued military support to defeat ISIL. They underscored the need to protect civilians and to provide full and immediate humanitarian access to United Nations agencies and their partners. They emphasized stabilization support for the return of internally displaced persons and public safety in liberated areas. They stressed that long-term recovery would stem from good governance, the provision of services, and sound security arrangements for all communities. Coalition members expressed support for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and for the efforts of the Government to enhance public services, reinforce inclusive governance, reduce corruption, decentralize designated federal

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authorities, ensure the rights of all Iraqi citizens and promote national and local reconciliation and accountability for crimes by ISIL.

4. At the meeting, Prime Minister Al Abadi argued against containing ISIL, stressing the need to completely eliminate it. He affirmed his Government's commitment to decentralization, economic reform, combating corruption and working with all Iraqis, including young people. He noted that the popular mobilization forces are now a part of Iraq's armed forces, and that the Popular Mobilization Commission Law brings fighters who have defended Iraq under the command and control of the State. He reiterated that the popular mobilization forces must not enter into elections and that no weapons must be outside the control of the Government.

5. During the visit of Prime Minister Al Abadi to the United States of America from 19 to 23 March, President Trump and the Prime Minister affirmed the commitment of their countries to a partnership aimed at rooting out terrorism and promoting security, political, economic, cultural and educational cooperation. In the joint readout from the meeting, it was stated that the security partnership was a vital component of the national security of both the United States and Iraq.

6. National reconciliation remained high on the political agenda of Iraq. Ammar al-Hakim, Chair of the National Alliance, visited the Kurdistan region of Iraq between 4 and 6 February. While there, he discussed the National Settlement Initiative of the National Alliance, as well as relations between the federal Government and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. He held meetings with the Kurdistan Regional President, Massoud Barzani, and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani, the Secretary-General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and former President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, the politburo of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and representatives of the Movement for Change (Gorran).

7. On 20 February, Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr issued a statement detailing 29 recommendations for Iraq. The recommendations include language on national and community reconciliation, reconstruction, the return of displaced persons, fair treatment of detainees and the integration of the popular mobilization forces into the Iraqi security forces. The proposal also recommends the establishment of a body to investigate human rights violations and consider the issues of minorities, in coordination with specialized governmental and parliamentary institutions, in addition to forming an Iraqi relief committee that would have access to affected areas.

8. On 30 and 31 March, I visited Iraq. While there, I met with Prime Minister Al Abadi, the President of Iraq, Fuad Masum, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, President Barzani and Council of Representatives Speaker Salim al-Jubouri, among others. During my meetings, I discussed the ongoing operation in Mosul and the protection of civilians, national dialogue and reconciliation, relations between the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Baghdad and the rights of minorities, among other issues.

9. In my meeting with Speaker Al Jabouri and several other Sunni political leaders, I received a document from the Iraqi Forces Coalition outlining their vision for national reconciliation, namely, the Historic Settlement Initiative. Former Speaker Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, the Chair of the Committee tasked with preparing the document, expressed the hope that it would bring about a more inclusive State. He explained that the goal of the Historic Settlement Initiative was to build confidence and to facilitate a historic settlement. The same day, the Muttahidun Coalition, led by Vice-President Osama al-Nujaifi, issued a statement

rejecting the Historic Settlement Initiative, emphasizing that it did not include the views of all Sunnis.

10. The implementation of the Popular Mobilization Commission Law saw limited progress. On 9 March, the Council of Representatives adopted a non-binding resolution calling for wage parity among equivalent ranks in the popular mobilization forces and the Iraqi army, in accordance with the law. On 21 February, the Council of Ministers instructed the Department of Disarmament and Militia Integration of the Office of the Prime Minister to transfer elements formerly belonging to the Awakening Forces ("Al-Sahwa") to the popular mobilization forces or the Iraqi security forces and to conclude the Department's operations in October 2017, in line with the 2017 Federal Budget Law.

11. On 17 January, the Council of Ministers announced that Provincial and District Council elections would be held on 16 September 2017, based on the recommendation of the Independent High Electoral Commission. According to the Commission, the adoption by the Council of Representatives of an updated legal framework for Provincial and District Council elections was required by 15 March to allow adequate time for preparations, but that deadline lapsed without progress. Amendments to the Law on the Provincial and District Council Elections (Law No. 36 of 2008, as amended), the Law on the Independent High Electoral Commission (Law No. 11 of 2007) and the Law on the Council of Representatives Elections (Law No. 45 of 2013) remain under consideration by the Council of Representatives. On 9 February, the Council of Representatives appointed an internal, ad hoc commission in charge of selecting a new Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission after the term of the current Board ends on 20 September 2017. The Council of Representatives debated a postponement of the Provincial and District Council elections to 2018, in which case they would be held concurrently with parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2018.

12. Political parties maintained interest in the electoral calendar and the legal and institutional framework. On 8 February, thousands of protestors loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr demonstrated outside the Green Zone, calling for amendments to the legal framework and the dismissal of the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission. On 11 February, several thousand protestors tried to reach the perimeter of the Green Zone. In the ensuing violence, at least 4 people died and at least 25 were injured, prompting Prime Minister Al Abadi to order an investigation. Following Al-Sadr's subsequent calls for "silent demonstrations" to reiterate demands for electoral reform, additional peaceful protests took place on 17 February. On 24 March, Al-Sadr addressed another demonstration in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, calling for continued peaceful protests until demands for electoral reform were met.

13. Coordination and cooperation between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government continued in the ongoing Mosul military operation and the ensuing humanitarian challenges. Between 4 and 6 February, the President of Iraq, Fuad Masum, travelled to Erbil and Sulaymaniyah to meet President Barzani and former President Talabani, among others. Upcoming elections, regional and international political developments and relations between the federal Government and the Kurdistan region of Iraq were reportedly discussed.

14. On 7 and 8 March, Prime Minister Al Abadi visited Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, underscoring the need for national unity after the defeat of ISIL. After their meeting in Erbil, Prime Minister Al Abadi and President Barzani praised the unprecedented military cooperation between the Iraqi security forces and the Peshmerga. During a speech at the Sulaimani Forum on 8 March, Prime Minister Al Abadi re-emphasized

the need for national unity in "winning the peace". In Sulaymaniyah, he met with representatives of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and representatives of the Movement for Change (Gorran).

15. Key issues between Baghdad and Erbil remain outstanding, including managing security in liberated areas, oil exports, revenue-sharing, budget implementation of article 140 of the Constitution of Iraq and disputed internal boundaries. On 30 March, during my visit to Erbil, President Barzani stated the intention to hold a referendum on the status of the region in 2017. He added that while the aim was not to immediately declare independence, the result would show the world the will of the people. On 2 April, the leadership of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan agreed to form a joint committee to build consensus ahead of discussions with the federal Government.

16. On 2 March, the head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Kirkuk told the media that he had ordered Peshmerga forces to enter a pumping facility of the State-run Northern Oil Company in Kirkuk and temporarily halt production. Tensions subsided during Prime Minister Al Abadi's visit to the Kurdistan region of Iraq, which was followed by an announcement by the federal Ministry of Oil that it had already increased the capacity of the Kirkuk oil refinery and would do so again before the end of the year.

17. At the request of the Governor of Kirkuk, Najmaldin Karim, on 14 March, the Kirkuk Provincial Council adopted on 28 March a decision to raise the flag of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, alongside the Iraqi flag, in front of local government buildings. A spokesperson for the federal Government and parliamentarians representing the Iraqi Turkmen Front called the act unconstitutional. On 21 March, UNAMI issued a press release expressing concern and cautioning against unilateral steps that jeopardized harmony among Kirkuk's many ethnic and religious groups. On 26 March, 50 civil society representatives protested peacefully against the public position of UNAMI in Erbil. The Head of the Department of Foreign Relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Falah Mustafa Bakir, also expressed concern about the stance of UNAMI during his meeting with my Special Representative. On 29 March, Turkmen minority representatives staged a peaceful protest in Kirkuk demanding that the Provincial Council decision of 28 March be rescinded. On 1 April, the Council of Representatives adopted a resolution to lower the Kurdistan region of Iraq flag at Kirkuk local government buildings, sparking reactions in Kirkuk, Erbil and Baghdad. On 3 April, Speaker Jubouri and President Masum, as well as my Special Representative, met separately with the heads of the Iraqi Kurdish parliamentary bloc to find a way forward. On 4 April, the Kirkuk Provincial Council voted in favour of rejecting the Council resolution.

18. On 5 and 6 April, a joint Kurdish Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan delegation visited Baghdad to hold separate meetings with Prime Minister Al Abadi, President Masum and Speaker Jubouri. The delegation included President Barzani's Chief of Staff, Fuad Hussein, Secretary of the Political Bureau of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Fadel Mirani, and member of the Political Bureau of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Adnan Mufti. Relations between Erbil and Baghdad, political and security developments and efforts to solve economic and other matters pertaining to relations between Baghdad and Erbil were discussed.

19. Efforts to reactivate the Kurdistan Regional Parliament and secure a political agreement in the Kurdistan region of Iraq continued without results. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan finalized its road map for inter-party discussions. The Kurdistan Islamic Union, the Kurdistan Islamic Group and the Kurdistan Islamic Movement explored a joint proposal on a negotiated solution. The agenda for negotiations and its sequencing reportedly continued to pose challenges to further progress.

20. On 21 February, the Kurdistan Regional Government signed a deal with the oil company Rosneft. The Minister of Natural Resources of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Ashti Hawrami, stated that the two-year agreement would allow for debt repayment and infrastructure investment.

21. Iraqi authorities and staff of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) met in Amman, from 5 to 17 March, to discuss the 2017 consultation on article IV of the IMF Articles of Agreement and the second review of Iraq's 36-month Standby Arrangement approved by the IMF Executive Board on 7 July. In a statement, IMF noted the Government's fiscal adjustments, supported by the financial assistance of the international community, which have led to a narrowing of the country's current account deficit. In the statement, it was noted that real gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2016 was sustained at 11 per cent, but that the non-oil economy had experienced an 8 per cent contraction, owing to the conflict and the fiscal consolidation, and that fiscal pressures remained significant. On 13 March, the global credit rating agency Fitch changed its outlook on Iraq from "negative" to "stable" and affirmed its B- rating. During his visit to the United States, Prime Minister Al Abadi met with delegations from the World Bank and IMF; both expressed their commitment to continuing to support Iraq.

22. On 27 March, the Minister of Culture, Faryad Ruwandizi, welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 2347 (2017), in which the Council condemned the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage and the looting and smuggling of cultural property in the context of armed conflicts, notably by terrorist groups. The Minister advised that the resolution would facilitate the retrieval of artefacts smuggled out of Iraq by ISIL.

B. Mosul campaign: protection of civilians

23. After the retaking of eastern Mosul from ISIL, civilians and security forces there continued to be subjected to rocket, mortar and drone strikes by ISIL, which incurred casualties. There were unconfirmed reports that ISIL had carried out attacks, using weaponized chemical agents, in Mosul and surrounding areas, in which 2 civilians died and 21 others, mostly children, were allegedly wounded. Prime Minister Al Abadi described the reports on the use of chemical weapons as inaccurate. The Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, Mohamed Ali Alhakim, also said there was no evidence of the use of chemical agents. The World Health Organization continued to work with the Department of Health and civil protection workers to ensure that people who might have been exposed to chemical agents were identified and treated.

24. During their advance on ISIL positions in western Mosul, Iraqi security forces continued to face heavy small arms, rocket and mortar fire, suicide car bombs, ambushes and sniper attacks by ISIL on a daily basis. ISIL continued to use civilians as human shields and to booby trap locations where civilians were being held with explosive devices, resulting in significant civilian casualties.

25. UNAMI received reports of civilian casualties resulting from operations by the security forces as well as air strikes carried out by Iraq and the international counter-ISIL coalition. Between 16 and 23 March, a number of air strikes on ISIL positions in western Mosul reportedly resulted in significant civilian casualties. On 17 March, an air strike targeted ISIL snipers and equipment located on and near a house in al-Jadidah/al-Risalah neighbourhoods in western Mosul. Witnesses told UNAMI that ISIL had forced 140 civilians to remain in the house as human shields, while its fighters launched sniper attacks from the roof and booby trapped the house with improvised explosive devices. As a result, at least 61 civilians were killed,

although other sources reported much higher casualties. The United States Central Command issued a statement on 26 March acknowledging that its forces had conducted air operations in the area on 17 March and that it had launched a formal Civilian Casualty Credibility Assessment to establish the facts of the incident. Prime Minister Al Abadi confirmed that Iraqi authorities had also opened an investigation into the incident.

26. On 20 March, an unattributed air strike targeted ISIL militants located on the roof of a house in Nabi Jarjees neighbourhood in western Mosul. The air strike killed 11 members of one family, including three children and two women, and wounded five others, including a child. Reportedly, ISIL had forced the civilians to stay in the house. On 22 March, an unattributed air strike hit a residential house in Rajm Hadid neighbourhood in western Mosul. ISIL was using the house to launch attacks on Iraqi security forces and had forced children and a number of adults to remain inside as human shields. The air strike killed a seven-year-old girl and trapped eight other children under the rubble, who were subsequently rescued.

27. The Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq issued a statement on 24 March underscoring the responsibility of all parties to do everything possible to protect civilians, including prohibition against the use of people as human shields and the indiscriminate use of firepower. On 28 March, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, stressed that, as ISIL intensified the use of civilians as human shields, the protection of civilians must remain paramount. Condemning ISIL for ruthlessly exploiting civilians, he cautioned that the conduct of air strikes on ISIL locations in such an environment might have a lethal and disproportionate impact on civilians. He urged Iraqi security forces and their coalition partners to ensure compliance with obligations under the international humanitarian law principle of precaution, to consider all tactical options with a view to avoiding civilian loss of life and to reduce the impact of operations on civilians to an absolute minimum.

28. On 3 April, commenting on the situation in Mosul, Prime Minister Al Abadi referred to the lack of capacity to accommodate all internally displaced persons seeking to leave Mosul. He urged residents to stay in their homes, highlighting the risk of their being attacked by ISIL or being used as human shields. Iraqi security forces dropped leaflets appealing to residents to stay in their homes and recommending that they maintain their distance from ISIL combat positions.

29. UNAMI received a small number of reports of violations committed by Iraqi forces, which it has referred to the Government for investigation. For example, 34 Sunnis fled from Tilkaif district, Ninawa governorate, to Mosul on 8 February, after a Christian commander belonging to the popular mobilization forces allegedly issued an ultimatum to vacate the district.

30. Preparations to liberate Tal Afar also progressed. Popular mobilization forces retained control of the major highway near Tal Afar that connects Mosul to Iraq's border with the Syrian Arab Republic and continued their operations west of the town to prevent the reopening of ISIL supply and escape routes.

31. ISIL retained control of Hawijah district in Kirkuk governorate and areas in western Anbar governorate and maintained a limited presence in Salah al-Din and Diyala governorates. On 15 February, an ISIL suicide vehicle-borne bomb killed at least 5 people and wounded 20 in the Habibiyah neighbourhood of Baghdad. On 16 February, another vehicle-borne bomb killed at least 51 civilians and injured at least 45 in Baghdad's Bayaa' neighbourhood. On 4 April, suicide bombers attacked police in Tikrit, and in the ensuing clashes, at least five ISIL militants were killed and dozens of police and civilians were killed or wounded.

32. On 24 February, the Iraqi air force conducted strikes against an ISIL target in the Syrian town of Abu Kamal, located approximately five kilometres from the Iraqi-Syrian border. Prime Minister Al Abadi stated that the air strikes in Abu Kamal and concurrent air strikes in the town of Husaybah, Anbar governorate, were in response to the ISIL attacks in the Habibiyah and Bayaa' neighbourhoods of Baghdad. The Iraqi Joint Operations Command confirmed that the Iraqi air strikes in Abu Kamal had been coordinated with the Syrian Arab Republic. On 8 March, Prime Minister Al Abadi emphasized the Syrian Government's consent to the strikes and pledged additional strikes on ISIL targets in the Syrian Arab Republic, should the security of Iraq be threatened.

33. On 3 March, media reported that clashes between Peshmerga forces, comprising Syrian Kurdish elements, and the Sinjar Resistance Units, a mostly Yazidi militia with connections to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, had erupted in Sinuni subdistrict of Ninawa governorate, south of Sinjar. The two sides reportedly quickly agreed on a ceasefire but tensions persist, raising concerns of another escalation. On 14 March, clashes broke out between Peshmerga forces and demonstrators supporting the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Khanasur town near Sinjar, which left 10 people injured and 1 dead. In a public statement, the Ministry of the Interior of the Kurdistan region of Iraq accused the Kurdistan Workers' Party of provoking the Peshmerga.

C. Regional and international developments

34. Iraq continued its engagement with regional countries, international organizations and the wider international community to promote political, military, humanitarian and economic cooperation. Prime Minister Al Abadi attended the 2017 Munich Security Conference held from 17 to 19 February, alongside President Barzani. Both thanked the international community for supporting Iraq's fight against terrorism and held a series of separate bilateral meetings with world leaders. On 26 and 27 February, President Barzani travelled to Turkey, where he met with the President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the Prime Minister, Binali Yıldırım.

35. At the Summit meeting of the League of Arab States (LAS), held on 29 March in Jordan, Prime Minister Al Abadi met bilaterally with Arab counterparts to rally support for the fight against ISIL and for humanitarian, economic and development assistance to Iraq and to discuss regional cooperation between Iraq and other Arab countries. He reiterated the importance of supporting the national unity of Iraq and respecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the final Summit statement, it was affirmed that the stability and territorial integrity of Iraq were cornerstones of Arab security. Following the visit on 25 February of the Saudi Minister for Foreign Affairs, Adel al-Jubeir, to Iraq, Prime Minister Al Abadi met with King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud of Saudi Arabia on the margins of the LAS Summit. Saudi assistance for humanitarian and stabilization efforts in liberated areas and bilateral trade were among the key issues discussed.

36. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, participated in the thirty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council, in Geneva. Iraq currently serves as Deputy Chair of the Council.

37. Iraq received high-level visits from a number of international counter-ISIL coalition partners, including the United States, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Italy and Tunisia. Iraq also received high-level visits from the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

38. On 26 January, the Council of Ministers of Iraq discussed the terms of reference and endorsed the budget for the Iraq-Kuwait joint boundary technical

project, which had been previously formulated during a workshop hosted by the United Nations Secretariat in New York from 24 to 27 October 2016. Erroneous media reports on the discussion of the Council of Ministers caused domestic controversy over the Khor Abdullah waterway, part of Iraq's maritime border with Kuwait, but not a part of the joint boundary technical project. That led to public demonstrations. On 30 January, the Council of Representatives established an ad hoc committee on the Khor Abdullah waterway. On 10 February, while in Cairo, Speaker Jubouri discussed the issue with the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait, Marzouq al-Ghanim, assuring him that Iraq was committed to good relations with its neighbour. During the workshop in October, Iraq and Kuwait had agreed that the confirmation of the project should be officially communicated to the Secretariat no later than 30 December 2016. The terms of reference have yet to be endorsed by the Council of Ministers.

39. On 14 March, Prime Minister Al Abadi spoke with Turkish Prime Minister Yıldırım about bilateral relations, the fight against ISIL and regional developments. Prime Minister Yıldırım confirmed that Ankara was working to assist displaced persons in Iraq. Prime Minister Al Abadi reiterated his long-standing call for the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Iraq. Turkish air strikes continued to target the Kurdistan Workers' Party in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, with at least 10 instances reported since 3 February. The Turkish authorities issued public statements expressing concern about the raising of the Kurdish flag in Kirkuk, noting that such action was not compatible with the Iraqi Constitution. The Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran also publicly raised concern.

40. On 16 December 2015, 27 Qatari nationals were abducted in Muthanna governorate. On 18 December, Prime Minister Al Abadi informed the Prime Minister of Qatar, Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al-Thani, that the Iraqi authorities were working to secure their release. On 21 April 2017, all the Qatari abductees were released to the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior and later handed over to an envoy from Qatar, who travelled with the abductees to Doha on the same day.

41. The Executive Order of the President of the United States of 27 January, which imposed temporary measures to restrict entry into the United States of citizens of seven countries, including Iraq, prompted unfavourable reactions in Iraq. Another Executive Order of the President of the United States, issued on 6 March, excluded Iraq from the list of countries affected, noting the positive steps taken by its Government. On 6 March, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq welcomed the exclusion of Iraq, adding that it reinforced the United States-Iraqi strategic alliance.

III. Update on the activities of the Mission and the United Nations country team

A. Political activities

42. My Special Representative continued his engagement with government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of political parties, women's groups, civil society and religious and community leaders to advance inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation in post-ISIL Iraq. He called for intensified efforts to overcome divisions ahead of the post-liberation phase, in order to strengthen political management and governance, combat corruption, improve public service delivery and protect human rights.

43. Referring to the National Settlement Initiative put forward by the National Alliance, my Special Representative continued to urge all Iraqi parties, representatives of Iraq's diverse communities, and civil society groups, including women and young people, to outline their vision for national reconciliation, as the Iraqi Forces Coalition had done in its Historic Settlement Initiative. He visited the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan and the United States to solicit support for Iraq.

44. In January, UNAMI launched a series of events called "Iraq: Youth and Coexistence", aiming to incorporate the voices and vision of Iraq's young generation in the national reconciliation process, with a view to building a united post-ISIL Iraq, based on the principles of equality, citizenship and peaceful coexistence. On 28 January, 18 February, 18 March, 25 March and 8 April, my Deputy Special Representative for Political and Electoral Affairs chaired youth forums in Basra, Erbil, Najaf, Baquba and Sulaymaniyah, respectively.

45. As the electoral process gets under way, UNAMI has engaged with the constitutional and political leaders of Iraq, the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Legal Committee of the Council of Representatives to discuss the electoral calendar and potential amendments to the electoral legal and institutional framework. My Special Representative has underlined that decisive actions are needed to allow for a timely holding of the elections, including parliamentary elections in April 2018.

46. After the violent demonstration in Baghdad on 11 February, UNAMI condemned the intimidation and threats of violence against the Independent High Electoral Commission, its staff and their families, while encouraging institutional and legal reforms. Further, the Government of Iraq was called upon to provide the current Commission with all necessary support and protection until it is replaced through existing legal and democratic mechanisms.

47. UNAMI continued to promote participation by women in the elections and the peacebuilding and reconciliation process, including the National Settlement Initiative and the Historic Settlement Initiative. The Mission engaged with the Iraqi National Reconciliation Commission to support the integration of gender perspectives into its work. On 20 March, UNAMI hosted a consultative forum with civil society organizations on the participation and representation of women in electoral processes.

48. In continued support for dialogue between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, UNAMI leadership met regularly with representatives of both Governments and with political parties. They urged political leaders in the Kurdistan region of Iraq to chart a way out of the political and constitutional crisis in the region.

49. My Special Representative travelled to Kirkuk on 15 March and underscored to Governor Najmaldin Karim the need to promote political dialogue and abstain from steps that would adversely affect the situation in the governorate. He highlighted the importance of close coordination between the local authorities and the United Nations on humanitarian, stabilization and development activities. They discussed preparations for Provincial Council elections in the governorate.

50. My Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Bangura, visited Iraq from 28 February to 3 March, in the context of the implementation of the 2016 joint communiqué by Iraq and the United Nations on prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence. She met with senior political leaders in Baghdad, Erbil and Dahuk, religious leaders, civil society and service providers. In addition, my Special Representative for Iraq visited Shekhan, Ninawa governorate, on 14 March, where he met with Prince Tahsin Beg, spiritual leader of the Yazidis,

Baba Sheikh and other key community leaders. In follow-up to Security Council resolution 2299 (2016), UNAMI has appointed a Senior Women's Protection Adviser to strengthen capacity and support the Government's efforts to implement the joint communiqué. UNAMI continued to advocate for amendments to the family protection draft law in accordance with international standards, which is under consideration by the Council of Representatives.

B. Electoral assistance

51. Following the decision of the Council of Ministers that Provincial and District Council elections would be scheduled for 16 September 2017, the Independent Commission started preparatory activities, including electronic voter identification and electronic ballot counting, with technical support from UNAMI. As at 3 April, biometric data of more than 10 million voters, around 49 per cent of whom are women, had been collected and were being cross-checked, prior to finalizing the voters list. A separate process for the biometric registration of internally displaced persons continued. As at 2 April, the Commission had approved the registration of 24 political parties out of the 240 that had submitted their application for registration as at that date. The Commission also opened the process for the accreditation of agents and observers for the elections.

52. On 1 March, UNAMI invited the Chairs of both the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission to provide a joint electoral briefing for the Erbil-based diplomatic community. The Chair of the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission emphasized the need for support by the international community. UNAMI confirmed that the memorandum of cooperation of 8 October 2015 between the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission was the basis for extending United Nations support.

53. On 12 March, the Council of Representatives invited UNAMI to send a representative to the ad hoc parliamentary committee tasked with the selection of the next Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission. The Mission will participate in the process, in an advisory capacity. UNAMI also continued to engage with the relevant committees in the Council of Representatives on electoral reforms.

C. Human rights developments and activities

54. Armed conflict, terrorism and acts of violence continued to take a terrible toll on civilians. Between 3 February and 3 April 2017, at least 908 civilian men, women and children were killed and at least 1,163 wounded, bringing the total number of civilian casualties in Iraq since the beginning of the armed conflict in January 2014 to at least 80,521 (28,023 killed and 52,498 wounded).

55. UNAMI received innumerable reports of serious and systematic violations of international humanitarian law and gross abuses of human rights perpetrated by ISIL. The organization continued to use civilians and civilian infrastructure and private homes as shields. In contravention of international law, ISIL conducted organized terrorist activities directly targeting civilians. In addition, sources indicate that there may be 1,739 Yazidi women and girls who remain in ISIL enslavement.

56. ISIL continued to target civilians in areas retaken by Iraqi security forces, including through suicide attacks, indirect fire and weaponized drones. For example, on 10 February, two attacks by ISIL fighters wearing explosive vests targeted two

restaurants in eastern Mosul, killing at least 12 civilians and wounding at least 26. On 4 February, indirect fire hit a residential area in south-east Mosul, killing 12 civilians, including four women and two children. ISIL markedly increased the use of weaponized drones to target civilians in retaken areas of Mosul. For example, on 23 February, a drone attack in eastern Mosul killed 12 civilians and wounded 9 others.

57. On 5 March, ISIL forced some 50 civilians into a house in western Mosul and later used them as human shields. On 6 March, the Iraqi security forces rescued 48 civilians still kept in the house. ISIL punished civilians refusing to join the group. On 20 February, ISIL demolished five houses of civilians who refused to fight for the group. It continued to punish civilians accused of cooperating with Iraqi security forces. For example, on 11 February, ISIL reportedly abducted 10 men in Hawijah, Kirkuk governorate. On 2 March, ISIL militants publicly executed nine civilians in western Mosul.

58. ISIL claimed responsibility for attacks targeting civilians in areas other than Ninawa and Baghdad. The group also targeted Salah al-Din governorate. On 8 March, an attack by four individuals wearing explosive vests targeted a wedding in a village in the southern Bayji district, reportedly killing 27 people and wounding 23 others. On 15 March, a vehicle laden with explosives detonated in Tikrit, killing 8 civilians and injuring another 40, as well as three members of the Iraqi security forces.

59. On 9 February, Iraqi security forces discovered two mass graves in Rutbah, Anbar governorate, reportedly containing the remains of some 25 security force members and civilians killed by ISIL in 2014. On 25 and 26 February, an area close to Azba village, about 10 kilometres south of Mosul, was retaken. It contains a sinkhole where it is alleged by Iraqi security sources that ISIL has buried thousands of bodies. The site is surrounded by improvised explosive devices and booby traps and is not yet secure. As with other suspected mass grave sites, the number of victims and the details surrounding their murders can be determined only after systematic exhumation has taken place.

60. The Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, co-chaired by UNAMI and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), received reports of 92 incidents of violations against children, affecting 180 children, between 3 February and 6 April. At the time of reporting, 70 of those incidents, affecting 136 children, had been verified. Forty-nine of the verified incidents involved killing and maiming primarily in Ninawa governorate, with 60 children confirmed killed and 49 maimed. Twenty cases of recruitment and use by ISIL were also verified, while seven children were verified to have been abducted in Anbar. Two schools in Ninawa were confirmed to have been damaged as a result of conflict. UNAMI continues to advocate that the protection of civilians be at the forefront of the planning of military operations. Prime Minister Al Abadi has publicly reiterated his Government's commitment to the protection of civilians and to ensuring justice and accountability for human rights violations and abuses committed in relation to the conflict. Religious authorities have spoken out. In weekly sermons, the representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani stressed the importance of protecting civilians and minimizing damage to civilian property and called for humane and fair treatment of detainees. The Shia Endowment continued providing humanitarian relief to civilians affected by the fighting, while popular mobilization forces launched a campaign to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced persons from Mosul on 17 March.

61. UNAMI continued its support to the committee of experts appointed by the Council of Representatives to oversee the process of nominations for the new Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights. The United Nations is a full member of the

committee pursuant to the law establishing the Commission. Nominations closed in May 2016. Prior to the holding of candidate interviews in March 2017, members of the committee attempted to remove the United Nations representative from the committee, insisting that the United Nations was only an observer. The United Nations representative subsequently stopped attending the meetings of the committee and called on the Speaker of the Council of Representatives to suspend the work of the committee until the matter was resolved.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

62. An estimated 500,000 civilians are living under ISIL control in the western districts of Mosul and remain at extreme risk. At least half of them are children. Civilians who have fled the city report severe shortages of basic food, clean drinking water, fuel, medicine and infant formula. Fighting in the densely populated old city, where up to 400,000 reside, continues to be fierce. Three mobile trauma stabilization points are operating near the front lines and three field hospitals are treating injured civilians. Since military operations began on 17 October, over 6,000 wounded people have been sent to hospitals for trauma care. Two one-stop integrated service centres for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence have been established and mobile teams are providing psychosocial support and referrals for displaced women and girls who have survived gender-based violence.

63. Although the Iraqi security forces have committed to a humanitarian concept of operations, fighting in western Mosul has been more intense than in the east, with greater impact on civilians, in terms of displacement and destruction. By early April, close to 250,000 civilians had fled western Mosul; another 250,000 are likely to leave in the weeks ahead. The Ministry of Migration and Displacement and humanitarian partners will soon have up to 19 emergency camps and sites to receive newly displaced people, located east, south and north of Mosul. With displacement increasing, urgent efforts are under way to expand space in camps nearest to the city.

64. During the fighting in eastern Mosul, more than 550,000 civilians stayed in their homes. Of the more than 161,000 who fled, more than 90,000 have returned to their homes. The remaining 70,000 are housed in emergency sites and camps. Since October, partners have reached 1.8 million people from Mosul and its environs with emergency response packages, including both displaced people and people who were able to stay in their homes. UNICEF continues to truck more than 2.3 million litres of water daily into eastern Mosul. More than 673,000 people have received household kits, more than 1 million have received food parcels and 640,000 people have received medical care. Health partners have already set up four trauma stabilization points and two more are presently being established. A 50-bed field hospital has been opened outside of Hammam al-Alil. Markets and commercial routes have begun to reopen and 455 schools are now functioning.

65. The humanitarian operation in Iraq remains one of the largest and most complex in the world. As many as 11 million people are expected to require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2017, including more than 3 million currently displaced persons. Partners worry that as many as 1.2 million additional people may be forced to flee their homes during the year, depending on the intensity of the military campaigns to retake Mosul, Tal Afar, Hawijah and other areas. The Humanitarian Response Plan, which was launched in Brussels in December 2016, seeks $985 million to respond to the needs of the 6.2 million vulnerable Iraqis, including families returning in increasingly large numbers to retaken areas. Already more than 1.6 million people have returned to their communities but remain vulnerable to shocks, with many requiring humanitarian assistance.

66. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization continued to expand. By April 2017, more than 500 projects were under way or had been completed in 22 liberated towns and districts in Anbar, Ninawa, Salah al-Din and Diyala governorates. The projects rehabilitated basic grids, put people to work, helped businesses to reopen, boosted Government capacity and facilitated community-level reconciliation. More than 200 projects are under way in eastern Mosul and retaken areas in Ninawa, including the rehabilitation of water treatment plants, electrical substations, schools and health-care facilities. In preparation for the liberation of western Mosul, additional specialists have been recruited and supplies and equipment pre-positioned and readied for use. Medical equipment has already been supplied to health facilities treating injured civilians fleeing western Mosul. The first 45 projects under the expanded stabilization channel of the Funding Facility are under way. They are designed to rehabilitate medium-sized public institutions, which generate large numbers of jobs in liberated cities, and to stabilize the agricultural, transport and electrical corridors between districts. A pilot project to address the needs of women-headed households is being implemented in peri-urban areas, where local governments are concerned about possible reradicalization. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and the International Organization for Migration are supporting programmes in retaken areas in the agriculture, health, education, livelihoods, youth, peacebuilding, management of gender-based violence and housing sectors. The United Nations Mine Action Service continued to provide coordination and technical advice to organizations working on protection issues and conducting survey, clearance and risk education. In support of stabilization, 1,350 explosive devices and homemade explosives were cleared from critical infrastructure. Furthermore, advocacy by the Mine Action Service resulted in an agreement to embed military engineers in civilian clearance teams, which will address the inability of civilian entities to conduct demolitions, and reduce the direct threat of explosive stockpiles.

67. Partners continued to support the Government to elaborate a new national development plan and Iraq's second poverty reduction strategy. In anticipation of a reconstruction conference after the liberation of Mosul, the United Nations country team commenced work on a recovery and resilience framework with integrated programmes in transitional justice, reconciliation, economic diversification, returns, security sector reform, the delivery of basic services, survivor support, governance and anti-corruption, and the prevention of violent extremism.

E. Security and operational issues

68. On 30 October 2016, the Department of Safety and Security activated an Iraq humanitarian support cell in Erbil, to support humanitarian and stabilization activities related to anti-ISIL operations in Ninawa. From 1 November 2016 to 23 February 2017, 170 missions were conducted, including 11 missions with very high residual risk and 159 missions with high residual risk. The United Nations security management system continued to work with Government authorities to ensure that security measures were in place during humanitarian and stabilization activities.

69. Construction and renovation in the integrated United Nations compound in Baghdad continue. Fifty-seven new accommodation units were added in Baghdad in January and 79 new accommodation units are projected to be completed in June 2017. Another 116 new accommodation units are scheduled for completion by

August 2018 and planning has commenced for 250 additional office spaces. In addition, the renovation of infrastructure, offices and other facilities is planned. As part of its greening initiatives, the Mission started producing 240 kWs of electricity on 28 February, through solar panels.

IV. Observations

70. During my visit to Iraq, I delivered a message of solidarity to the Iraqi people, Government and institutions as the country continues in its fight against terrorism. I called attention to the need to support internally displaced persons in Iraq during a visit to Hassan Sham camp. I welcomed the commitment of the country's leaders to civilian protection and national reconciliation and pledged the ongoing support of the United Nations as the Government seeks to bolster aid delivery to needy populations and rebuild Iraqi institutions. I also expressed the need to find an adequate mechanism of effective accountability for crimes committed by ISIL.

71. As the Iraqi forces continue their progress in their fight against ISIL, action that brings the country closer to long-term peace and stability is imperative. Dialogue, which results in inclusive political solutions, is critical. I therefore urge all of Iraq's main components, minority communities, religious and community leaders and civil society groups, including those representing women and young people, to engage in discussions to achieve an historic national settlement. Their own visions of national reconciliation, such as the National Settlement Initiative of the National Alliance and the Historic Settlement Initiative received from the Iraqi Forces Coalition, will be indispensable for creating a broad-based, representative debate about sustainable peace. Efforts by countries of the region and other international partners to support Iraq in this process are encouraged and welcome. The United Nations will continue to use its good offices and act as a facilitator, in coordination with the Government.

72. Progress towards national reconciliation will be vital in the aftermath of the liberation operations. Restoring peaceful coexistence among all components in Mosul and Ninawa governorates, including minority groups, is essential to instil country-wide confidence in the possibility and promise of a national settlement. All necessary actions should be taken to enable the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons, including from minority communities, and to protect fully their civil and political rights, including their enfranchisement in the forthcoming elections. I encourage the Government to continue its efforts to put in place effective governance and security arrangements in Ninawa governorate.

73. I call upon Iraqi leaders to put in place a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for elections and to conclude the selection of the incoming Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission in a timely and inclusive manner. The current Commission needs to expedite the registration of political parties. The United Nations will continue to provide technical assistance, as requested, and to promote inclusivity and the active participation of women in politics.

74. The stability and unity of Iraq hinge on the rule of law, based on a legal framework that upholds inclusiveness and equality. I urge the Government and the Council of Representatives to adopt the outstanding priority legislation, including the Justice and Accountability Law, the Anti-Terrorism Law, the Federation Council Law, the Provincial Powers Act and the Components' Rights Law.

75. As military operations wind down, Iraqis will expect concrete steps towards eradicating corruption, improving service delivery and decentralizing governance.

This will require vigorous cooperation among all stakeholders. The participation of women in all decision-making processes is vital.

76. The continued cooperation and coordination between the Iraqi security forces and the Peshmerga are welcome. A commitment to address all outstanding issues between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government is needed. The visit by Prime Minister Al Abadi to the Kurdistan region of Iraq is an encouraging step. Additional steps need to be taken to enhance dialogue, including on the management of security in liberated territories, oil exports, revenue-sharing, Peshmerga salaries, disputed internal boundaries and the return of internally displaced persons to their places of origin, in accordance with humanitarian and human rights principles.

77. I call upon the political leaders of the Kurdistan region of Iraq to redouble efforts to make substantial progress towards ending the political stalemate in the region, which has kept the Kurdistan Regional Parliament from convening since October 2015.

78. During my participation in the thirty-fourth Summit of LAS in Jordan, I welcomed the progress in retaking territories from ISIL and expressed readiness to cooperate with Prime Minister Al Abadi and all Iraqi leaders towards an inclusive system of governance in which all communities are represented, respected and safe. The visit to Baghdad by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia and the Prime Minister's meeting with the King of Saudi Arabia are of note, including the attendant steps to enhance cooperation, trade and investment. I commend efforts by the countries of the region to support Iraq and engage with the Government, including through the provision of humanitarian assistance, with full respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Government of Iraq is encouraged to expedite efforts for the Iraq-Kuwait joint boundary technical project, which was agreed last October, to start without further delay.

79. The protection of civilians is paramount to restoring sustainable peace and long-term stability in Iraq. Minority communities remain particularly vulnerable. I urge the Government and the international coalition to remain steadfast in their commitment to keep the protection of civilians at the centre of the military operations against ISIL, to keep their procedures and tactics under review with the aim of avoiding civilian casualties and to reduce the impact of operations on civilians to an absolute minimum. The appeal by religious authorities to prioritize the protection of civilians is welcome. Reports of forced evictions of civilians in liberated areas and the obstruction of the return of displaced persons to liberated areas are concerning. I urge the Government to investigate reported violations of humanitarian and human rights laws and norms, including with regard to detainees suspected of terrorism or support to ISIL, and to bring perpetrators to justice in an expeditious, transparent manner that upholds the rule of law and promotes reconciliation. Creating the conditions for a safe, voluntary and dignified return of internally displaced persons is critical.

80. The terrible toll on civilians exacted by armed conflict, terrorism and acts of violence is deplorable. Women and children continue to suffer disproportionately. ISIL continued to use civilians as human shields and to target civilians in retaken areas, including through suicide attacks, shelling and weaponized drones. ISIL continued to punish civilians for allegedly cooperating with Iraqi forces and claimed responsibility for mass-casualty attacks in areas other than Ninawa. As ISIL has lost territory, more mass graves have been uncovered, including in Ninawa, Anbar and Babil governorates. Reports were received of alleged use of weaponized chemical agents by ISIL. I am appalled by the group's organized, systematic and gross

violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and I strongly condemn the atrocities perpetrated by ISIL.

81. The commitment of the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq, as expressed by the Prime Minister of Iraq and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government to my Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, during her visit to the country is welcome. I am encouraged by positive steps already taken to implement fully the joint communiqué on prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence in Iraq, including the appointment of high-level focal points to work together with the United Nations and the international community during the implementation phase.

82. While humanitarian agencies prepared for months prior to the Mosul operation, a crisis of this scale is nearly unmanageable. The Government and the United Nations have constructed 17 emergency sites around the city but space is limited and many, including all of the sites to the south, are already full. Humanitarian partners are working to expand space, but it is a race against time to ensure that camp expansion keeps pace with new displacements. If the number of civilians fleeing the city increases quickly, there will not be enough space. Humanitarian partners are working with the Government on a contingency plan to transfer people to 13 camps further away from Mosul, where space exists.

83. Continued stabilization activities through the UNDP Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization will be critical to consolidate military gains and to help to set the conditions for people's returns to their homes. This successful programme has disbursed or committed the majority of its funding, and current reserves and pledges will last until the end of April. To continue immediate stabilization activities, $500 million in new commitments will be needed, including $400 million for remaining phases in Mosul and $100 million for the 8 to 10 areas yet to be retaken.

84. Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, his two Deputies and all United Nations national and international staff, for their efforts to fulfil the United Nations mandate in Iraq under challenging circumstances.